

ER 4230X-87

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

23 SEP 1987

Mr. Andy Bigford  
Editor, Aspen Daily News  
P.O. Box DD  
Aspen, Colorado 86162

Dear Mr. Bigford:

I am always pleased when I have the opportunity to visit the Colorado mountains. This area has long played a role in my family's vacation and revitalization. It was with great pleasure that I accepted an invitation to participate again at the Aspen Institute--it brings such a diverse group together to discuss relevant issues.

I was equally pleased to read the article in your Saturday, August 29th, issue written by Mark Huffman which so accurately summarized the substance of my talk before the Aspen Institute. In full realization of the controversy surrounding the CIA these days, I believe it is important for the American public to better understand the vital role of intelligence in our democratic society.

Please extend to Mr. Huffman my thanks for the thorough coverage he provided my talk.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ William H. Webster

William H. Webster  
Director of Central Intelligence

DCI/PAO/WMBaker:rh

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P-308-15

29 August 1937

# Webster: CIA Plays Vital Role

## Despite Mistrust, Deeds Need To Be Done

By MARK HUFFMAN

Aspen Daily News Staff Writer

Most Americans mistrust spying and feel uneasy with the idea of intelligence gathering, but the practices have been part of guarding America since the days of George Washington, CIA director William Webster said Thursday.

Webster admitted to an audience of about 300 at Paepcke Auditorium that government secrecy has sometimes been used to cover up "mistakes and blunders" and that the "specter of Orwellian intrusion" is always in the back of citizens' minds when they think about clandestine operations.

But he maintained the job the CIA and other American intelligence agencies perform plays a vital role in safeguarding the country and that it can be done without violating American principles. Intelligence "is vital to preserving and protecting the United States (though) it must be conducted with absolute fidelity to our laws and with a system of oversight that builds rather than erodes confidence," Webster said.

SOME OF THE information the U.S. needs to know but can only get through spying are whether arms control agreements are being adhered to and discovering "the military capabilities and intentions of our adversaries," Webster said.

"Our government depends heavily on accurate intelligence," Webster said, and uses spies, intercepted communications, and satellite information to "make up a mosaic as complete as possible."

It's a job that's always been important but has become particularly vital in the modern world, Webster said, a job that must be done accurately and quickly. "Our forefathers had weeks and months to learn things and make decisions," he said. "Now we think in terms of minutes and cannot afford mistakes."

**WEBSTER ACKNOWLEDGED** that "secrecy troubles many people" because it has "been used to hide questionable practices ... and bypass laws." But he said he believes Congressional oversight has been strengthened in recent years and that elected representatives do well acting as "the official surrogate looking after the public's interest."

And he emphasized that violations of law and failures in direction must be corrected rather than offered as reasons to scrap the CIA and other intelligence groups. "It doesn't mean there is not chance for deception," Webster said of the oversight system, "but that doesn't mean there's no reason for secrecy."

Webster also spoke about recent instances of Americans selling secrets for cash, the flap over the bugging of the U.S. embassy in Moscow, the press and national security and the potential for terrorism in the United States. Among Webster's comments:

**On Americans selling secrets:** Webster said instances of paid spies selling secrets to foreign countries had made the job of counter-intelligence much more difficult. Spies who in the past passed secrets did so for ideological reasons, and their political activities often revealed their potential treason, he said.

But it's more difficult with "people who are on the take, who sell out for money," because they often give no obvious sign of what they are doing. Webster said American agents "have found such people in every intelligence agency in government."

But he said America does the same to foreign countries, and that "it's not a one-way street."

**About the embassy mess:** Webster called the situation "a sad chapter" in American intelligence and a "costly and time-consuming mistake."

"Why we gave the Russians a location (for their embassy) on the second-highest place in Washington and accepted a place (for the new American embassy) in the marshlands of Moscow I shall never know," he said.

Webster said he thinks the U.S. should refuse to let the Russians use their new embassy in Washington until the American embassy in Moscow is debugged.

**On the press and national security:** "We do not have a state secrets act in the United States and I'm glad we don't," Webster said. He said the situation where "the press is at liberty to print just about anything it can find out" is the traditional American way, and that he seldom has problems with it.

"I have found the press in Washington to be responsible," Webster said. "In the rare instances when I asked that something not be printed in the interests of national security my requests have been honored."

**On terrorism in the United States:** Webster said there were only about 15 terrorist incidents in the United States in the past year, down from nearly 100 for one year in the late 1970s. He said he believes the low figures result from the fact that America is a country in which there are many legal means to express dissent and many avenues for people who want to change things.

"We do have groups here in the United States planning and thinking about terrorist activities," Webster said. "But overall I do not think this is fertile ground for terrorism. There is no solid base of support."

Webster said there is "a danger of foreign terrorists operating in the United States, and the danger will grow 'if our activities in the Middle East are accelerated.'"

But he said America "is well equipped to deal with such activities." He pointed to the lack of terrorist incidents at the Pan Am games, the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles and at the 100th birthday of the Statue of Liberty as examples showing that "something is going right with our counter-terrorist efforts."

Webster spoke Thursday night before the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies.

Webster was named to head the Central Intelligence Agency in May after the death of William Casey. From 1978 until this year he was head of the FBI. He has also served as a federal judge and attorney.